

**Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis  
Government Reform Committee Hearing  
“Controlling Restricted Air Space: An Examination of the Management and  
Coordination of Our National Air Defense”  
July 21, 2005**

Good morning and welcome to the Committee on Government Reform’s hearing on the United States’ restricted airspace and how the federal government coordinates the protection of that space.

While we are all aware that restricted airspace exists across the National Capital region, restricted airspace is also scattered throughout the United States. It includes such obvious places as Camp David, and Crawford, Texas, to military bases. And there can be temporary flight restrictions put in place during certain sporting events and of course, depending on the President’s location. It is incumbent on pilots to be aware of these areas, and they learn of them through FAA Notices to Airmen.

To give you a sense of what we are talking about, we have two maps on display. One map shows all the restricted spaces and prohibited areas in the United States, including military bases. If you look at the coastal areas of the U.S., you can see there is a contiguous U.S. Air Defense Identification Zone, commonly known as ADIZ, which encompasses the entire U.S. water border. There is also an ADIZ surrounding Alaska and Hawaii. These zones are in place for defensive purposes, and they establish requirements for incoming international flights, including providing an established flight plan before entering the ADIZ.

The other map shows the restricted airspace over the National Capital Region. In total, the D.C. prohibited air space is approximately 20,000 square miles. The map shows two rings around the region. The inside ring is the Flight Restricted Zone, commonly known as the FRZ. The FRZ is the 15 miles around Ronald Reagan National Airport (DCA). Included within the FRZ is prohibited airspace over the White House, the National Mall, the U.S. Capitol, the Naval Observatory, and Mount Vernon, Virginia. The outside ring is the ADIZ. The D.C. ADIZ is a 30-mile radius around DCA, which spans out to Dulles, BWI and Andrews Air Force Base. At the top left of the map, you can see the bottom of a circle. This is the 3-mile prohibited airspace for Camp David in Thurmont, Maryland, which would be expanded when the President is at Camp David.

These maps of restricted airspace look daunting. It may seem even more daunting when we take into account the many departments and agencies responsible for watching this airspace. That is why we are here today, to better understand how these entities are working to manage and coordinate their efforts to protect and defend the United States’ restricted airspace.

One of the best steps taken in this effort was the creation of the National Capital Region Coordination Center (NCRCC). Housed in Herndon, Virginia, the NCRCC is an

interagency group that monitors D.C.'s prohibited airspace 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Washington, D.C. area is the only area of the country with such a center. The Department of Defense (DOD), FAA, the Secret Service, Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Capitol Police, along with TSA, which acts as the Executive Agency, are represented at NCRCC full time. During major events or surge operations, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, United States Park Police, the Coast Guard, and local law enforcement, including D.C. Police are also NCRCC participants.

Each agency or department at NCRCC is responsible for its own mission and jurisdiction as it relates to airspace security. However, the participants work together in identifying aircraft that have violated or may violate prohibited airspace. While the response to each possible aircraft violation is decided by each government entity independently of the others, the information is immediately shared by all participants at the NCRCC. That, at least, is our understanding of how it works – I know the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has some concerns about how well the coordination and information sharing actually functions.

According to NCRCC statistics, updated as of July 17, 2005, there have been 3,495 airspace incursions in the National Capital Region since January 27, 2003. These statistics are on the overhead. An airspace incursion can include a variety of incidents, including as you see on the overhead, FRZ violations, Camp David TFR violations, and penetrations of prohibited airspace. 655 out of the 3,495 incursions resulted in the decision to launch or divert government assets to intercept an aircraft.

As many of you know, occasionally, these airspace violations lead Capitol Police or the Secret Service to evacuate the Capitol complex and the White House. While none of us is particularly fond of the evacuations, I think it is important to note that only 3 times out of 3,495 incursions has that happened.

Despite the work of NCRCC, there are still questions to be asked regarding the government's coordination of the United States' airspace. Today, GAO is releasing an unclassified version of their report on the interagency management of restricted airspace. GAO asks some important questions: How is air defense working without a single government agency taking the lead? How do we adequately determine a threat to the prohibited airspace when agencies and departments have different definitions of what constitutes a threat? How will DOD, FAA, and DHS continue to work to improve information sharing? I believe these are all valid questions that merit discussion, and these agencies will have a chance to respond to GAO's concerns.

In the Washington area, we have three commercial airports, countless general aviation airports, and we are pleased to welcome general aviation back to Reagan National -- all of this aviation, combined with the flight restriction we see on the maps, clearly show that protecting America's airspace, particularly around the Nation's Capital, is a challenge. As the Committee responsible for oversight of the federal government, and the District of Columbia, it is our obligation to ensure these agencies are working

seamlessly together. A fast, coordinated response is absolutely vital if we are ever again faced with an aircraft with hostile intent.